Pamph.
H Mod.
P

Parti Ouvrier Belge.

31761 09428513 7

The Belgian Labour Party.

(Parti Ouvrier Belge.)

MEMORANDUM

on

PEACE TERMS.

LIBRARY
JAN 6 1923

LONDON:
THE WHITWELL PRESS.

1917.

The Belgian Labour Party.

(Parti Ouvrier Belge.)

MEMORANDUM

on

PEACE TERMS.

LONDON:
THE WHITWELL PRESS.

—

1917.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

https://archive.org/details/memorandumonpea00part

THE BELGIAN LABOUR PARTY.

(Parti Ouvrier Belge.)

Memorandum on Peace Terms.

AS soon as the European War began, the Belgian Labour Party proclaimed: (1) that the Socialist Democracy was in no way responsible for that disaster; (2) that the Belgian proletariat would lend their aid to check the invasion of their territory "all the more zealously because they were confident that, in defending the neutrality and the very existence of their country, they were also serving the cause of democracy and political freedom in Europe"; and (3) that the comrades who were called to the colours "ought to show themselves in all circumstances brotherly and loyal, and never to forget that they belong to the Labour Internationale."

After three years of sorrows innumerable and of grievous sufferings the Belgian working-class can proudly declare, before the proletariat of the world, that it has remained immovably faithful to the principles thus proclaimed at the decisive hour. Now, as on the 4th of August, 1914, the P.O.B. is convinced that Belgium had done nothing to justify the heinous aggression under which she ceaselessly bleeds. The Belgian Socialist workers will never regret having suffered and poured out their blood in the defence of right; succeeding events have

strengthened their opinion that, in defending the independence of their country, they are serving the cause of democracy and political liberty in Europe. They are not conscious of ever having forgotten for one single day that they belong to the Labour Internationale.

They have unhappily had to bear the most cruel disillusionment in seeing the high ideal of liberty and justice which the Socialist Internationale symbolised for them sullied and debased. They are convinced that community of interests and aspirations among the world's workers will eventually renew the broken ties; but they desire above all,—because it is the only means of reaching a fruitful issue,—to restore to the Internationale all its moral grandeur by re-establishing reciprocal sincerity and confidence. Never, however, will this end be attained without the recantation, censure, or dismissal of those who, through pride, egotism, delusion, or lack of courage, have betrayed the cause of International Democracy and Solidarity.

2.

It has been repeated in every country and in many forms that the basic causes of the war lie in the antagonisms of interest inherent in capitalist society; that these antagonisms have been embittered by the imperialistic tendencies of great States, favoured by dynastic ambitions, and brought to their extreme tension by the growing development of armaments, especially in Germany. The Social-Democracy of all countries has in the past denounced these antagonisms and their probable consequences with tireless energy. It has striven

almost single-handed against militarism and for international arbitration; it has denounced the blindness of the governing classes and the impotence of the bourgeois democracy. This will be remembered to its honour.

But if it be true that the main responsibility for the conflict rests upon imperialism, none the less there must be no question of giving way to the kind of despairing fatalism expressed in naïve formulas such as that of the unfortunate Social-Democrat German soldiers who repeat like a lesson or a pass-word, "Capitalism has caused the war." Such folk might as well bend the knee with resignation before the detestable philosophic dictum which a Prince of the Church has pronounced regarding the war, possibly with the idea of excusing the Catholic and Apostolic monarchy of Austria-Hungary, "God smites, the better to heal."

All the good sense and good feeling of the working-class, all its years of struggle and championship, protest against this tendency to hide under vague formulas real responsibilities and guilt, whether deliberate or unconscious. The workers know that capitalism tends to merciless exploitation of the undeveloped energies of women and children. This conviction has only been an additional incentive to syndicalist and political action compelling the employers to show greater regard for the welfare of their workers' wives and offspring. Moreover, in the international sphere the proletariat refuses to be merely the passive victim of hidden powers, self-styled sovereign and pre-ordained.

Unhappily, the strength of proletarian agitation against war was not always equally great or equally

successful in the different countries; and when the catastrophe actually occurred, we saw with inexpressible grief the immense majority of the organised masses of the Central Powers help, approve, and even applaud the imperialist enterprises of their Governments. English workmen once protested against the South African War; Italian women prevented military trains from starting for the Abyssinian expedition; the workers of Catalonia declared a general strike against the campaign in Morocco; the Belgian working-class eagerly aided the demolition of the hateful exploitation system established on the Congo under Leopold the Second's rule; the Russian people profited by the Russo-Japanese War to organise their first revolution in 1905.

Never has the German proletariat afforded us the spectacle of one of these great movements of revolt. On the contrary, during the long Franco-German dispute about Morocco, while the French democracy forced its administration, despite the incitements of the chauvinists and greedy capitalists, to a policy of conciliation and concessions, voices were raised even in the very heart of the German Socialist party to excuse the Kaiser's provocative acts and approve the colonial policy of the Empire. Need we recall the equivocal and hesitating attitude of the German section at the International Congresses each time that militarism came under review? Too easily did the proletariat everywhere accept the explanation offered,—that the internal political situation peculiar to Germany made it necessary.

How discerning was Jaurès when from the platform of the Amsterdam Congress he hurled his impassioned

invective at the German section : "You have no revolutionary tradition; you are politically powerless!" But there were even worse things than that : subterranean currents worked among the organised masses; chauvinism and imperialism had their defenders in the ranks of the party and completed the corruption of heart and spirit which the German schools and barracks had begun. At the first flicker of the formidable conflagration which enveloped Europe in August, 1914, the pupils of Hildebrand and Lentheur rushed to celebrate their triumph in the Central Empires, to lead away the masses, under cover of excited passions and official falsehoods, to display a total contempt of right, and glorify the spirit of conquest and domination.

3.

After the Balkan War, Austria-Hungary, the vanguard of German imperialism, fearing lest the road to the sea should be closed to her, sought to reassert her influence over the young Slav states which had been called to life by the aid of Russia. But in Serbia particularly she met with a resistance fully justified by Hungarian hostility to Serbia's economic development, and stimulated by national aspirations. Austria-Hungary took advantage of the Serajevo outrage to crush them, and, with the approval of the German Crown Council, which met in Berlin on July 5, sent Serbia an astounding ultimatum with the evident intention of driving that little country into war. Serbia, however, yielded almost every point, offering to refer the conditions under dispute to the Court of Arbitration at The Hague. Austria

declared war, which she had already tried to bring about in 1913, as Giolitti's revelations have since revealed. Russia frankly showed her intention of defending her protégés, and, with them, her own influence in the Balkans. She mobilised part of her forces.

Italy and France intervened in favour of an amicable arrangement; England proposed a conference of the Great Powers, which Russia accepted. Austria-Hungary, wishing at all costs first to punish Serbia, only consented to discuss subsidiary matters, and refused a Conference of the Great Powers. Germany left her ally a free hand, and under pressure from the Pan-German party and the military and naval coteries, took the Russian partial mobilisation—which she announced to her people to be a complete one—as a pretext for declaring war upon Russia, after the latter had at the last moment again proposed to refer the dispute to The Hague Tribunal. France proved her desire for peace by withdrawing her troops from the frontiers far enough to avoid any provocative incident—and we can still hear the resonant voice of Jaurès filling the immense Circus Hall at Brussels as he bore witness to his Government's wish for peace. Germany declared war upon her. Belgium, the sincere friend of all her neighbours, who had strictly fulfilled the duties of her neutrality—a neutrality imposed by Europe and guaranteed by Prussia—was invaded. England came to a decision.

Has there ever been a clearer case in history of the desire for aggression and dominion on the one side, and for conciliation and arbitration on the other? How did the Socialist party of the Central Powers act? The

Austrian Reichsrath was not even consulted about the Votes of Credit, but the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the official organ of the German Socialist party in Austria, hailed the opening of hostilities as a memorable date and gloried in "Germany's Day." In the German Reichstag, on August 4, the Socialist deputies unanimously passed the Votes of Credit; and when the Chancellor cynically acknowledged the violation of international law which he had committed by invading Luxemburg and Belgium, these men, the trustees of the honour of the Internationale, did not utter a word of protest or even of regret. Since then we have learned that fourteen of the party, in private session, contended that the group should either oppose the Vote of Credit or at least abstain from voting; but they were disciplined into consent, and through faint-heartedness became accessory to the crime. They missed their hour on the dial of history.

Meanwhile, the Belgian Socialists, bearing in mind the pronouncements of the German Deputy Müller at Paris, on July 31 : "In Germany an affirmative vote is absolutely excluded," and in spite of the shocking violation of their country, believed that the German proletariat had been drawn into the war against its will; and some militants, with Vandervelde at their head, visited the German prisoners to make sure that they were properly treated. They soon found themselves cruelly deceived and strangely rewarded.

4.

The Prussian hordes swept over the innocent and too-confident little country, herding men and women

before them, and behaving themselves according to their supreme chief's mandate to his troops sent against the Chinese Boxers—namely, like the Huns. They respected no law, human or divine; they pillaged, burned, murdered. The ruins of Visé, Herve, Andenne, Auvelais, Monceaux, Dinant, Tamines, Louvain, Aerschot, Termonde, and innumerable villages bear eloquent witness to the devastation committed without the least excuse of military necessity. In a few days the soldiery made more orphans among the civil population than the war itself has made in three years among our soldiers' families. The German Social Democrats remained silent before all these nameless horrors; while the German Press heaped insult and calumny upon the crushed populace, and the German Government published its lying story of francs-tireurs.

Authorised representatives of the German Socialist party came to look at the work of their nation and to visit their unhappy brethren. Hermann Wendel, who once cried, "Vive la France!" in face of the Reichstag, came to assert that Germany had been attacked, and that French soldiers were in Belgium before the German army arrived. Perhaps this man also believed the tale of bombs dropped upon Nuremberg. Liebknecht told us how his heart was rent by what he learned, and how remorse filled him as he gazed upon our smoking ruins. Then came Noske, and his acolyte Koster, to disclose with disconcerting cynicism the real opinion of the German Socialist majority: "You should have let them through!" Respect for treaties, national honour,—"a mere bourgeois conception!" He brought us good social laws

and the S.U.*—this man from Prussia. In Germany one could not refuse to vote funds without causing the ruin of the Socialist organisations; as for ourselves, we had no organisation. For the rest, he offered to speak to the superior authorities on our behalf. Never has the senseless pride and the domineering spirit of this people, Socialists included, been so plainly revealed. This was the same Noske who later on wrote a book in defence of the incendiarism and massacres at Louvain. Did he not pretend to have noticed marks of the francs-tireurs' bullets upon the ruined walls?

While the whole world rang with the groans of our tortured population, and protests arose on every side; while the Emperor had our walls placarded with the assurance that "his heart bled" at the thought of the sufferings which he had to impose on us, the imperialistic movement in the heart of German Social-Democracy was brought to light. One saw "Haenisch" and Lensch, David and Quesnel, Gohre and Südekum undertake a crusade by word and pen on behalf of the "civilising" mission of Germany,—chiefly by shamelessly falsifying the immortal doctrines which Marx bequeathed to the masses. Most of the Syndicalist chiefs and the elected members permitted—ay, often approved, these corrupters of the Socialist and revolutionary spirit, who at this very hour still flaunt themselves at the head of the party.

In neutral countries Socialist opinion, like public opinion, everywhere espoused Belgium's cause. Even though one sees that the rulers' first business was to save their own countries from the storm, it is still difficult to

*S.U.—Suffrage Universel.

understand why the International groups—who also sheltered themselves behind general formulas—did not take up a firm position and denounce the politics and the actions of the Central Powers and their Socialist parties. It was particularly painful to us, in these circumstances, to witness the absurd attitude of certain English Socialists who, through hatred of imperialism, blamed their Government for having taken part in the war. They could not see that England's abstention would have sealed the triumph of the worst of imperialisms and militarisms. The Belgian working-class, whose heart beats with a boundless love and admiration for heroic France, will be eternally grateful to England for having respected treaties and saved her independence, instead of imitating certain backboneless neutrals and playing the rôle of Pontius Pilate, as she was urged by these Socialists to do.

5.

After the first weeks of patriotic exaltation; after the whole world had vibrated with indignation at the recital of the infamies perpetrated in Belgium; when the truth had, in spite of everything, filtered through the published diplomatic documents; above all, after the decisive check which the imperial armies sustained upon the Marne and the Yser—one would have imagined that the German Social-Democrats would have recovered themselves. Nothing happened. Scheidemann refused our Dutch friends' suggestion to make an enquiry into the methods of conducting war in Belgium. Haase relates that for the session of the Reichstag on December 2, 1914, long private discussions of the Socialist party were neces-

sary before it was agreed to insert at the head of the group's official declaration a short passage recalling the Chancellor's words of August 4 about Belgium.

Having from the first days of the war forgotten the high ideal of right which the Internationale embodies, the majority of the German Social-Democrats remained bound to the militarism and the imperialism whose instrument it had become, and it has continued its complicity in numberless outrages on International Law. Thus, it has dumbly looked on at the systematic destruction of every industry in Belgium by the removal of all machines and raw materials. It has allowed our railwaymen and our quarrymen who refused to work for the enemy to be condemned. It has been silent in the face of the countless sentences to deportation, prison, and death which have fallen broadcast among our inflexible population, often with no pretence of legal trial.

Moreover, on every occasion in the Reichstag, the Socialist majority, instead of taking up an independent position, has favoured Government designs by always giving support to equivocal motions designed to further the imperialist policy. When the minority made an interpellation in November, 1915, in regard to the desirability of peace negotiations, the majority rejected the preliminary form proposed by the minority suggesting negotiations on the basis now so much commended :—"No annexations; no indemnities." Was it not Heine who applauded the Government statements, saying that military events alone could decide the proper moment for discussing conditions of peace? Did not Südekum openly demand the guaranteeing of the frontiers needed by his

country, and economic links between the European States? After each debate in the Reichstag, did not the majority docilely vote in favour of the Government—after Spahn or Bauermann, in the name of the bourgeois party, had interpreted its conclusions as favourable to these "necessary guarantees on the East and on the West"?

We find the same ambiguous and tolerant attitude towards the Government when the question of the submarines came up. The Socialist majority followed the bourgeois majority in voting unanimously for the resolution in favour of the unrestricted use of this new weapon, with no regard for International Law—as the Socialist minority immediately proved, and as later events demonstrated. But it is in relation to the wholesale deportation of tens of thousands of Belgian workers, whether out of work or not, that contempt for the fundamental rights of every man, of every labourer, was disclosed with the greatest cruelty and cynicism. What became of the protests of the Socialist majority? Sullenly, and under conditions, they agreed to a few phrases supporting the efforts of the minority. Where were their protests against the abominable treatment to which these unhappy beings were subjected in the German camps, during a long, hard winter, without fire, without food, sometimes even without blankets?

With a cynicism almost inconceivable, Bauer, one of their Syndicalist leaders, dared to inform the secretary of the Belgian Syndicalist Commission that the measures taken against the workers were suggested by the Hainault manufacturers; that the Socialist majority dare not protest too loudly for fear of public opinion; and that the Socialist deputies could not tell what took place in camps which

they were unable to visit! But he affirmed that his colleagues were working behind the scenes, and that our unfortunate comrades would obtain justice! Yet even now, in July, 1917, thousands of Belgian labourers, forcibly carried off in November and December 1916, are still waiting for their repatriation, in spite of the Emperor's own promise. Those who were full of life and energy when deported are sent back to us ghosts of their old selves, while others, many of them, have died in exile or soon after their return home.

But the workers' martyrdom is not yet ended, for as fast as the military zones are extended in our country the military chiefs swoop upon our compatriots and send them to work—no longer in German factories, but actually in the trenches on the Western front, under the fire of the Allies. During the Flanders battles poor wretches have been forced to carry munitions to the German artillery while in action. All-powerful militarism, unable to break the resistance of the Belgian labourers (in German camps), has taken a noble revenge! When did the German Social-Democrat raise his voice against these atrocities? And if possibly he did so "behind the scenes," where is his influence with his Government? And if the latter still persists in such conduct, why does he always vote the supplies needed to carry on its hateful work.

Must one also recall all the meannesses, the vexations, the hourly wounds, the hateful or ridiculous measures to which the Belgian population has had to submit for three years past? The schools are closed for lack of coal in a country which produces a surplus of coal, because the

invader, to improve his mercantile exchange, has requisitioned coal to sell to neutrals. The committees are debarred from organising technical instruction, the workers are turned out of factories, where only twelve men at a time may now be employed. The communes are forbidden to undertake useful public works, the people are left without potatoes during six months of the year in a country whence in normal times they are exported by the hundred thousand sacks; the smuggling of food-stuffs into Germany is encouraged in defiance of signed engagements. A remarkable breakdown of the greatly-vaunted German organisation has occurred in regard to all classes of food, so that for long months past the workers have not known the taste of either butter or meat, and find themselves reduced to living upon a little bread and soup; while the invader, thwarting the initiative of the communes and committees in every possible way, deals in all kinds of native products without paying the slightest heed to the most elementary rules of common honesty.

Next comes wholesale corruption, and division sown among the ranks of the populace by the exploitation of Flemish demands. Because there had been no success with the organised working-class, which proudly refused the degrading gifts offered by Councillor Bidmann in the Emperor's name, certain fanatics were approached, amongst them persons of no standing and deeply in debt, from whom the "Council of Flanders" was formed, in flagrant disregard of international conventions and without the sanction or approval of any of those who have a public mandate in Flanders or who have played a central part in the Flemish movement. At the very moment when

attempts were on foot to make the world believe that there had never been any intention of striking at Belgian independence, a plan for separating Walloons and Flemings was produced, which revolted the public conscience. Germany imprisoned and deported officials who were faithful to their oath, who refused to help the enemy in his work of division and destruction. Immediately the *Vorwärts*, encouraging the blacklegs, wrote that these measures would have a good effect upon "culture" in Flanders. "In whatever circumstances you find yourself, show yourself brotherly and loyal," the P.O.B. had cried on the 3rd August to comrades called to the colours. How far we are now, alas! from the last remnant of fraternity and kindness! Dispersing all previous illusions, German militarism has inflamed the heart of the proletariat with an indestructible fire of hatred. We sometimes contemplate with terror the days when the nation shall be liberated, and all the flood of injustice and suffering, misery and ruin, crime and disgrace inflicted upon Belgium will come to light,—rousing such hatred as history has scarcely known before.

6.

We are told: "They are not all equally bad." We know it well enough. We have listened with anxious attention to the slightest rumours from Germany. We have seen those admirable women, Rosa Luxembourg and Klara Zetkin, imprisoned with prostitutes for bearing aloft the standard of the Internationale when war broke out. We have followed the efforts of Liebknecht, Mehring, and their comrades to open the eyes of the German workers.

We know in what manner they paid for their boldness. We have seen the minority, headed by the beloved veterans of the Social-Democrats,—Bernstein, Kautski, Haase, Ledebourg—little by little shake off its inertia, recant the mistakes it made on the outbreak of the war, and free itself from the deadly grip of a humiliating discipline. We have seen it at last break with the majority; and, in spite of endless difficulties caused by the state of war, by the censorship and repression, we have seen a movement set in among the masses which is more and more favourable towards these men. We cannot, however, forget that they allowed themselves to be over-reached and deceived, that they lacked foresight or courage, that they did not give vent to their protests and their distress when Prussian militarism struck mercilessly at the poor Belgian proletariat, which now remains distrustful, passionately hoping for more decisive deeds.

Moreover, what sort of a reception have the efforts of the minority met with among the party majority? With the help of the military censorship, and in agreement with trade union officials, the heads of the party, tools of the Government, have captured the independent Socialist journals at Berlin, Stuttgart, Bremen, Duisborg, Königsberg, etc. They have turned out of the party committees the staunchest militants, because they were faithful to the principles of the Internationale, and have slavishly helped the military authorities, by means of the civil service vote, to repress the working-classes. They have taken the management of the *Gleichheit,* the brave organ of the women Socialists, out of the hands of Klara Zetkin; they have permitted their official publications to

slander the heroic Friedrich Adler, who, doubtless, was guilty of drawing Austria out of the atmosphere of absolutism and oppression in which she languished. But, on the other hand, they have tolerated the propaganda and actions of the imperialistic Socialists, who openly preached Germany's "civilising" mission, and last September went so far as to applaud the idea of a separate peace—not with revolutionary Russia but with Russia of the Tsardom. They loudly discountenanced the riots among the Berlin working-class folk, who clamoured for a little more bread.

When the German workers come back to their better selves, free themselves little by little from their bad shepherds, renounce their deputies—as happened to Scheidemann at Solingen—then neutral Socialists come exhorting Belgian Socialists thus: "Do not argue about the past; restore old relations; come and talk things over with them as with good, trustworthy Socialists." How do they expect us to believe in these men's Socialistic sincerity and sense of justice, when they do not know how to be just or tolerant towards their own people, not even to the best among them? The P.O.B. has a higher ideal of what an International Socialist reunion ought to be, and this explains why so far it has refused every invitation from a "neutral" section of the Internationale.

But there are other reasons why it should refuse to lend itself to any attempt at a *rapprochement* fathered by one or other of the complaisant neutrals. Certainly the Belgian workers do not forget the warm and active sympathies which they have met with among most of the International sections; but neither do they forget the

attitude of certain so-called "neutrals." They cannot forget that the Swiss, Grenlich, backed up Nathan's offer to the Italian Socialists—an offer of 100,000 fcs., refused with disdain, however—to encourage them in anti-war propaganda. They do not forget the shameful journey through Belgium, under the conduct of the invader, of certain Scandinavian stalwarts, who carefully avoided making any inquiries among their Belgian fellow-Socialists—obviously with the intention to deceive International public opinion. They have also clear in memory Grimm's lamentable use of the worst methods of bourgeois secret diplomacy to induce the Russian revolutionaries to treat with Prussian autocracy and militarism. Finally, they have seen, almost with stupefaction, Troelstra, president of the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee, receive the self-styled representatives of the pretended Flemish activist Socialists, men with no mandate or authority behind them, and enter into discussions with them with an air so serious as to border on buffoonery. Is this not enough to make us suspicious of these neutrals' advances?

7.

Does this then mean that the P.O.B. attaches no value to, and refuses to participate in, any effort made to throw more light upon the general situation? Nothing is further from its thought and wishes. In September, 1914, it approved the temporary displacement of the B.S.I.,* so that the latter might keep the International organisation alive. It recorded with satisfaction the resolutions favourable to Belgium passed at the Confer-

* B.S.I.—Bureau Socialiste International.

ences of Neutral Sections held at Copenhagen in 1915, and at The Hague in 1916. It was happy to take part in the London Conference, in February, 1915, where for the first time one of the groups of belligerents formulated the principles of a durable and fruitful peace; principles to which nothing has yet been added. It was the first to respond to the appeal of the B.S.I., at The Hague, in February, 1915, requesting that each section should put forward its point of view. In December, 1916, it repeated its opinion, and stated exactly how it regarded peace and the struggle in favour of it. It followed with the most anxious attention the progress of the sections of the Internationale before the mixed Committee at Stockholm, which continued the enquiry attempted at The Hague in 1915.

What have these meetings and conferences taught it? They have confirmed it more and more in the opinion it expressed at the very beginning of the war, that, in this unprecedented conflict, the decisive struggle is one between two irreducible principles: Either the world will henceforth live under the same menace and anxiety as in the past of outrage and fresh efforts at domination on the part of the Great Powers, able still to hold their people in leading-strings; or free sovereign peoples will be seen disposing of their own destiny in the community of nations, just as they arrange the details of their social life.

The undying hope which the Belgian proletariat had in the triumph of democracy was transformed into absolute certainty when they saw with deep joy the Russian proletariat, the most persecuted in the world, break its chains and, at the first blow, win for its country

a foremost-place among modern democracies. It is not difficult to understand the strong and legitimate desire of the Russian people to secure an early peace, which would leave them free to consolidate victories won at home. The German Government tried to profit thereby and conclude a separate peace, not hesitating, in order to secure this object, to countenance certain of those "dangerous" Russian revolutionaries whom they had formerly hunted down without scruple for the Tsar's pleasure. It even protested a kind of friendship for the Revolutionary Government. The Austro-Hungarian Government, hoping to cause trouble and hesitation in the minds of the Russian masses, went further still. Itself embarrassed by grave internal difficulties, it declared that it was not looking for any annexation or indemnity *from the Russian side;* but it failed to add that it meant to recoup itself at the expense of the Serbians, Roumanians, and Montenegrins. Once more, in the course of these manœuvres, one saw the majority of the German Social-Democrats using every means to induce belief in the sincerity and loyalty of these ambiguous and reserved declarations.

Instead of pointing out to the German proletariat the fine example of the Russian people in overthrowing their tyrants, instead of lining up all democratic and revolutionary forces against the last centre of autocracy and reaction in Europe, and using the Russian revolution to dictate to Europe a peace based upon the principles of the Socialist Internationale, the heads of the German Social-Democracy (Majority Party) endeavoured to use the revolution to secure a German peace which would

leave intact both Prussian militarism and the autocracy of the right divine (!) of the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs.

8.

When the delegates of the German Social-Democrats answered the interrogations of the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee at Stockholm, they once again showed that they placed the triumph of " Germanism " above the rights of nations to dispose freely of themselves, and that they had no intention of restoring to any of the European nationalities those liberties of which Prussian militarism and autocracy had already deprived them. The formula of the Soldiers' and Workers' Committee in Russia, loyally interpreted, would serve as a basis for the establishment of a durable peace; but the German Socialist majority interprets it in a one-sided way, agreeing on this point with the majority of the German Social-Democrats in Austria.

The P.O.B. does not consider that there will be the least use in discussing affairs with these sections so long as they persist in this attitude, which is manifestly opposed to the basic principles of the Internationale. The P.O.B. fully realises that the German Socialist majority as a whole no longer wishes for territorial conquests at Belgium's expense; but the revelations made at Stockholm contain hints about a possible position of vassalage for our country in regard to France and England, an allusion only slightly disguised under the pretext of necessary guarantees, not defined. Moreover, it must not be imagined that the

Belgian proletariat, because it insists so strongly upon the justice of its own cause and upon the miseries that it has suffered, thinks only of its national interests. On the contrary, because it eagerly hopes to see established in Europe political conditions which will allow the International proletariat to act with the maximum effect, it is heart and soul with all oppressed nationalities and desires their complete deliverance.

The P.O.B. wishes the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, and considers this reparation a condition essential to a durable European peace. It also desires the reconstruction of a free and independent State of Poland—not merely Russian Poland, but with Galicia and Prussian Poland included. It desires that peace shall bring with it the liberation of the Czechs and the Slovaks, the Ruthenes, the Italians, the Serbs, and the Roumanians at present subject to a German minority in Austria and to the Magyars in Hungary. It desires the escape of the Armenians from the Turkish yoke under which they have suffered so much, and their inclusion, say, in the great family of self-governing Russian nations. It desires, in a word, that the principles of the peoples' right to dispose of themselves shall be applied definitely, logically, and sincerely.

The Belgian working classes have in the last three years learned to know what feelings must animate a people which has been unwillingly subjected to foreign rule. They often think of the sufferings of Alsace-Lorraine, of the tens of thousands of Poles who have been hanged in Galicia since the war began, of the numberless brutalities to which the Italians of the Trentino have been exposed,

and of all the sorrows which Austrian domination has inflicted on the Czechs, Serbs, Croats, and Slovaks. They consider that no sacrifice could be too heavy which would assure a free and independent life to these oppressed nations; and this is why they do not desire a premature peace which would re-establish the *status quo ante bellum*.

Now, it is this *status quo* that the German Socialist majority wants, and the Austrian Socialist majority too. By what right and in virtue of what principles do these professed Socialists continue to sacrifice the liberty of so many peoples to the interests and ambitions of their autocrats? They repudiate the eloquent protestations of Bebel, Liebknecht, and Schweitzer against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870. Nor do they accept, even to end the war, what scarcely 25 years ago Engels pointed out to them as an immediate duty: "The German Social-Democracy cannot exercise or retain power unless it repair the injustices which its predecessors have committed in regard to other nationalities. It must prepare for the re-establishment of Poland, which was betrayed by the French bourgeoisie; it should place Schleswig and Alsace-Lorraine in a position to express freely their views on their political future." Germans other than Lassalle have denounced Austria-Hungary as the European State most hostile to civilisation; have wished to "see the nigger who would not appear a white man beside the Austrian." This Austria, "the reactionary principle, the most formidable foe of all ideas of liberty," Friedrich Adler has revealed to us as unchanged during the course of this war.

9.

In regard to the proper indemnities due to different countries, the German Socialist majority preserve the same hostile attitude. Belgium, Serbia, the wasted provinces of France, will have to heal their own wounds in the way laid down by the German interpretation of the formula: "No indemnities." What? Take the case of Belgium. It would mean that Germany would with impunity have raised heavy war contributions of hundreds of millions of francs from the provinces and towns, imposed endless fines on trifling—sometimes the most ridiculous—pretexts on individual towns and villages; carried off our machinery and raw materials; systematically destroyed our factories; seized all kinds of manufactured goods at ruinous prices; torn up thousands of kilometres of our railway lines; wound up, in order to make a shameful profit, the businesses of all those who refused to work for the enemy; destroyed and burned whole towns and villages without the slightest military reason; massacred in heaps thousands of defenceless inhabitants; deported workmen wholesale to die of hunger, of cold, and of ill-treatment; behaved, in a word, so that there no longer exists a family which has not to weep its dead, its ruins, its physical and moral downfall.

And the responsible authors of all these ills, according to the German Socialist majority, after having taken everything, stolen everything, destroyed everything in their work of domination, are now, after missing their stroke, to have the right to withdraw scot-free and disown the solemn promise made by the Chancellor on August 4,

1914, and endorsed unanimously on December 2, 1914, by the Socialist Party. And doubtless we shall be asked further to pledge ourselves to let them immediately resume the old business relations and flood the world freely with their own productions, while for long months, perhaps years, the Belgian working classes and those of Northern France must spend their strength in reconstructing their factories before the country can sell a ton of merchandise. Ah well! if necessary, if it be impossible for us to recover under these conditions, they will give us charity, but . . . drawn for the most part from our Allies' pockets.

The P.O.B. will not accept alms of this kind for its country; it will not become a race of beggars: it only wants its rights, and it will have them!

But what can we expect from these pretended Socialists—whose fundamental mission is to fight against all exploitation of man by man—who, in most tragic circumstances, through national egotism, actually admit and excuse the cynical and systematic exploitation of a small, valiant, and loyal nation by a more powerful one dragged by its rulers into an aggressive campaign? How dare they invite their victims to meet and deliberate in perfect confidence with the representatives of such conceptions of Social Brotherhood?

The P.O.B., then, refuses to participate now in any conference whereat the Majority Party of the German Social-Democrats will be represented. It can expect nothing from them so long as they maintain their present attitude and continue to support Prussian autocracy and militarism. It will not, by now accepting the invitation

to discuss a peace programme, help to deceive the working classes of the nations. Further, it will not rehabilitate the leaders of the German Socialist Majority Party in the eyes of the German workers who have begun to regain possession of themselves. It will never agree to any reunion unless the question of responsibility is to be threshed out fully; for upon that depends every possibility of future action.

10.

If the P.O.B. considers a conference with the delegates of the Majority to be morally impossible, it has no longer, however, the same reasons for refusing any meeting with the delegates of the Minority Party. The courageous attitude of Liebknecht, the persevering struggle of the Minority against the Imperialist movement, the plain statement formulated at Stockholm, the explicit assertions of Haase in the Reichstag on July 20th, are sufficient indication that there are in Germany, in the heart of the proletariat, some Socialist forces which have remained sound, upon which the Internationale may lean again when full light has been cast on past events and mutual confidence has been completely restored.

The P.O.B., therefore, does not refuse to join in a conference with the delegates of the German Socialist Minority, in order to exchange the necessary explanations for the re-establishment of that mutual confidence which is an indispensable preliminary to action. But from now onwards the P.O.B. abides by its decision that it cannot accept the tactics suggested by the Minority to realise its peace programme.

The German Socialist Minority demands, where *nationalities* are concerned, the reconstitution of an entirely independent Belgium; of Serbia, linked up with the Austrian Serbs; and of Poland, its three parts reunited,—that is, the part now subject to Prussia included. It demands a definite solution of the Alsace-Lorraine question by permitting the population, after straightforward discussion, to express its own wishes. In short, the Minority claims for all oppressed nationalities the right to decide their own fate and enjoy self-government.

The German Socialist Minority also requires that, in conformity with the Chancellor's pledge given on August 4th, Belgium shall be *indemnified*. It approves of compulsory arbitration; of a general disarmament; of free commercial intercourse between nations; international protection of workers; respect for the rights of natives in the colonies; and universal free trade.

The P.O.B. recollects that it put forward the same demands in its Note of December, 1916, when the German Socialist Minority replied that the continuation of the war prevented their realisation, and insisted upon immediate peace negotiations. The P.O.B. categorically refuses to enter at present upon so *illusory* and *dangerous* a course.

Illusory, indeed, as the latest events in German internal politics have emphasised! Certainly, the long duration of the war, its sufferings and miseries, and, above all, the manifest impossibility of securing a definite victory, have made the German masses reflect, and a vast peace movement has begun. The wish for peace is such that one sees the Catholic Centre,—through fear for its popu-

larity, not through a sense of justice,—change its attitude and try to make people believe that it only desires a peace of reconciliation. But the formula voted in the Reichstag, once more with the connivance of the Socialist Majority, lacked clearness and honesty; the Socialists, the Centre, the Chancellor, and the Pan-Germans themselves interpreted it each in their own way, to suit their very diverse wishes.

Though the formula were clearly opposed to all annexations, open or disguised, all the declarations of the German Government and of all the parties which support it are absolutely hostile to the reconstitution of an entirely independent and unified Poland and to a straightforward solution of the Alsace-Lorraine problem. The intervention of the higher military authorities and of the Crown Prince in the recent crisis which led to the fall of von Bethmann-Hollweg, the solemn declaration of the new Chancellor that Hindenburg and Ludendorff approved his ambiguous statements, show plainly enough that militarism and imperialism are still all-powerful in German politics, internal and external. How then can the German Socialist Minority hope, by making peace, to break down these influences, to make them retreat or yield?

Does not the Minority itself denounce the illusion which the Majority fosters concerning the democratising of Prussia? . . . and the introduction of real Parliamentary control in Germany? Even if the greater part of the German people turned their thoughts henceforth towards conciliation, it is certain that they are loath to accept the principle that each nation has a right to dispose of itself. And in any case, all their aspirations would shatter them-

selves against the stronger wishes and forces over which they have no control. The people is politically impotent; it might be all-powerful in name, although in reality it could do nothing.

The P.O.B. considers all agitation in favour of a premature peace to be *dangerous*. It has said so already in its Note of December 12, 1916. It must repeat this with the emphasis justified by later events. It has followed anxiously, and sometimes with irrepressible indignation, the propaganda of the Russian Maximalists, blinded by narrow theories and led astray by the chaos around them—one knows now with what melancholy results. Was there ever so sad a sight as this employment of the purest doctrines of Socialism to serve,—in the long run,—the purposes of the King of Prussia?

With grief we have seen comrades, experienced Socialists in France, Italy, and England, lend themselves to these peace manœuvres. We cannot comprehend their blindness and infatuation in imagining that they can deliver Europe from the nightmare of war by treating with the autocratic and military powers, and that a real and sincere recognition of the rights of nationalities can be obtained from them. We deny the right of neutrals to stir up feelings of pity and humanity at the risk of seeing the most sacred rights trampled under foot. But we also think we have the right ourselves to say to the pacifists of France and Italy, England and Russia : " Your sufferings are nothing beside ours; your populations work and fight for themselves, they are better nourished, better clad, better warmed than ours; they still have moral gratifications of inestimable value. Our Belgian population,

on the contrary, has languished for three years in gaol; it is often compelled to work for the enemy; it is short of food, clothing, fuel; it has not the comfort of a friendly Press, nor visits nor letters from its fighting men. Yet—question these people, and they will tell you they desire no limping peace. They object to any agitation which would result in breeding illusion and doubt, weariness or discouragement among their comrades at the front who are carrying out that hard but noble task,—the liberation of humanity from the burdens of the past."

The P.O.B. is still convinced that there are only two ways of succeeding:—either force of arms, or a radical change in the ideas and institutions of the Central Powers themselves,—such a change as will enable the democratic nations to meet them with confidence in their good faith and to treat with them on the basis of the principles contained in the honestly-conceived formula of the Russian Soldiers and Workers. This radical change of ideas in Germany and Austria will come, but only under pressure of necessity, such as made the Emperor Charles promise Hungary universal suffrage and the nationalities of Austria constitutional reform. It is under the pressure of circumstances that the King of Prussia has again promised Prussia the S.U. But each of them wishes to retain his sovereign right of deciding upon war and peace. Each of them still refuses Parliamentary control and the peoples' right to dispose freely of their destiny. It is only through the continuation of the war that—from without or from within—this last barrier to the triumph of democracy and equity will be destroyed.

11.

The P.O.B., then, refuses to collaborate in any movement in favour of an immediate peace.

Does this mean that the different national Socialist sections should remain passive as regards the conditions of future peace?

On the contrary, the Belgian Labour Party thinks that the rôle which the different Socialist bodies have to fill is of the first importance, both from the point of view of the success of the Allies' cause and from that of the Internationale. From the point of view of our cause it is essential that the *moral* of those fighting for the right should remain good, and that any introduction of the leaven of discord into their ranks should be avoided. To this end it is necessary that each soldier should be immovably convinced that he fights and sacrifices himself for a high ideal of justice; and that the Allied Governments be made to state precisely what are their war aims, so that the purity of their intentions may be clearly manifest, especially their hostility to all annexations which do not comply with the peoples' own desires.

In this sense, however ridiculous the hypothesis may appear, the P.O.B. does not consider that Vandervelde—whose very frank opinion on the subject has been expressed—should remain in a Ministry which has any intention, hidden or confessed, of seeking extension of the country towards either the Rhine or Holland. The Socialist parties must therefore compel their Governments to take up a clear position on the subject, and it is of the greatest importance to the ideal of democracy that

they should prove by their Parliamentary proceedings that democratic rule, even in time of war, is something more than an empty expression.

They are also held to this position by the actual principles of the Internationale, which they must not under any circumstances sacrifice to pretended national interests, that frequently only hide capitalist greed or nationalist or chauvinist tendencies. They thus owe it to themselves and to the Internationale to denounce and dissociate themselves from all outrages upon international law committed by any authorities whatever. In a word, the sections of the Internationale should everywhere earnestly endeavour to formulate a policy of frankness and sincerity.

But under pretext of such action the P.O.B. cannot admit the over-simple thesis of those who intend to place all governments upon the same level, making them only the representatives of the bourgeoisie and capitalism, and drawing therefrom the conclusion that the issue of the war does not concern the working-class. The P.O.B. refuses to parley with people who ignore the declared principles of the Internationale and will not allow the proletariat to have the right and duty of defending their country, the victim of a war of aggression. Such theories, in the present state of Europe and its institutions, lead directly to the triumph of the most reactionary countries over those politically most developed.

The P.O.B., therefore, refuses as entirely useless and impossible, any meeting with the groups following the leadership of Zimmerwald; just as elsewhere, for obvious moral reasons, they refuse to treat with the delegates of the Russian Maximalists.

It is, in fact, totally inadmissible to start again in the midst of the Internationale the impossible game of reconciling the most contradictory tendencies.

Finally, the P.O.B. does not admit that certain Belgian groups, formed haphazard abroad, have any right to speak in the name of the Socialist working-class of Belgium. The latter counts upon its immense majority in the country; it keeps in touch with its mutual-help societies, its co-operatives, its trade unions, its student groups, all still alive and active after three years of war. It is the real Belgian Socialist workers' party. As to those who are abroad, if any among them deserve to be consulted—supposing that it were possible to control their position as party members—they must first think of those who are at the front, next of those who work in France or England for their country, then of those who languish in German or Dutch camps, and, finally, of those who sought refuge in Holland, who can only be a feeble minority, without real links with the workers, and, therefore without authority.

End of July, 1917.

Printed in Great Britain by The Whitwell Press, 64A Balaam Street, Plaistow, London, E. 13.